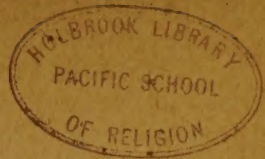


The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM



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DEAR MEMBER,

Mr. Lampert, who contributes our supplement this week, reminds us of the "abyssal mutual ignorance" which gapes between Britain and Russia. Unhappily there are still too many partisans on each side who are interested in the perpetuation of such ignorance. British apologists for private profit as the supreme economic incentive do not readily open their minds to the thought that Russia's first "five year plan" produced a rate of capital accumulation beyond the dreams of voluntary saving and investment. Meanwhile, Russian communist leaders have naturally been reluctant to disseminate information illustrating the achievements of our communal social services so illogically embedded in a capitalist structure, or the degree to which private capitalism, prompted by its own vile motives, does in fact produce mass luxuries for the workers. Better that such things should not be known. They spell risk to one's cherished illusions—or rather to the illusions which it is expedient that others should cherish.

But the barriers are falling—and many of us are anxious to assist the process of demolition—stimulated as much by regret at past abuse as by misgiving at present adulation of all things Bolshevik. For headlong revulsions of public feeling are irrational and unlikely to be permanent. The events of June, 1941, did not profoundly change the beliefs of our new allies, and unless we make haste to extend the range and depth of our understanding of their beliefs some new turn of events may see another revulsion of public feeling as irrational in its origin and far more disastrous in its consequences than the last.

COMMUNISM AND CHRISTIANITY

The comforting notion that the ruling class in Russia, having disestablished and disendowed the Tsarist Orthodox Church, merely offers a fair field and no favour to religious creeds, cannot of course survive Dr. Oldham's recent informative supplement on the subject.

But what of the future? There are two significant considerations which I should like to throw into the discussion. The first is the fact that in one respect (in *one* respect I say) Marxism as understood by its Russian adherents is a good seed-bed for the religious interpretation of life. Much as those adherents would resent the suggestion, the Marxist interpretation of history is essentially religious in that it conceives of the grand sweep of human events in terms of a pattern, embodying a purpose with which the individual must co-operate for larger ends than his own self-interest. The habit of mind which must be generated by the perpetual reminder of this purposeful historic process (and in Russia the reminder is perpetual to the point of tedium) is likely to offer less mental resistance to the insertion of a familiar adjective before the word "purpose" than is the case with those who share the questioning bewilderment of the Prophet Esdras or the rational scepticism of H. A. L. Fisher in face of the apparently perverse and unpredictable sequence of human events.

The second factor is so familiar that its restatement will seem platitudinous. I will not labour it. But those of us who watch the reactions of vested interests to the sacrificial requirements of a war economy will have some understanding of the tough resistance offered by the human spirit to the Christian "way" which leads to truth and life. It was observable in the response of a certain rich young man to an insistent call some nineteen centuries ago. If that young man had been shorn of his riches, or reared in an environment in which it was regarded as disreputable to be richer than one's neighbours, his readiness to tread that "way" might have been more enthusiastic. So may Russia's.

COMPETITION AND SOMETHING WORSE

But our new allies have yet another start of us in the quest for the kingdom of heaven. They have emerged so recently from a disruptive and destructive revolution as to be a very plastic society. Privilege and status-consciousness are in the early stages of re-making. We are by comparison a *status-ridden* community, seeking everywhere through the machinery of innumerable vocational and trade organizations, each with its authenticated hall-mark, to achieve social and economic security for the individual. We are a *security-haunted* community in which each organized group looks fearfully at the rest, terrified, and not without cause, for hard-won standards filched from a threatening competitive scramble. We dare not set our prisoners to useful work, though their twisted natures cry aloud for such consolation. We are doubtful of our ability to produce the needful quota of duly hall-marked teachers to meet a more generous conception of educational need. The catering trades are alarmed by the spread of municipal restaurants; they must be reassured. Women *may* be allowed as a war-time necessity . . . but relaxation is risky.

Do we realize that by leaving individuals to organize their own security and erect their own barriers for the preservation of the status which conditions it, we are blinding the eyes of the spirit with jealousy and poisoning the springs of enterprise with fear? The orgy of free competition in which our grandfathers and great-grandfathers disported themselves was doubtless an unseemly and un-Christian scramble. It was, however, positive and stimulating—and deserved some of the things which Sir Ernest Benn continues to say in praise of it. But the anti-toxin which it generates in its own blood-stream, the defences which it erects against itself, are negative and deadening. Maybe we have something to learn from the devotees of Karl Marx about the evolution of those defences and the conditions which may some day render them irrelevant.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Stocks

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